

Article

Deconstruction and Reconfiguration: Buddhism's Selective Appropriation and Transformation of the *Pātāla* Netherworld Concept

Yunsheng Zhang ^{1,2}

¹ Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies, Shandong University, Jinan 250100, China; 202490000138@email.sdu.edu.cn

² School of Philosophy and Social Development, Shandong University, Jinan 250100, China

Abstract

In Indian religious traditions, *pātāla* denotes a seven-layered subterranean realm beneath the earth, a composite space that combines cosmological stability with mythic expressiveness. It serves as the dwelling of *nāgas* and *asuras* and connects with the human world through rivers and caves. Although Buddhist literature retains narratives about these beings and their splendid abodes, it never accepted *pātāla* as an independent cosmological unit. This article examines Pāli, Chinese, Tibetan, and Sanskrit Buddhist sources in comparison with Hindu epic and Purāṇic literature and analyzes the translation of *pātāla* in Chinese versions. It argues that Buddhism engaged in selective restructuring by deemphasizing *pātāla*'s cosmological hierarchy and subordinating it to the Mount Sumeru framework, while transforming it in esoteric ritual literature into a liminal field of practice accessible through mantra, mudrā, and specific practices. Utilizing Arnold van Gennep's liminality theory, the study shows that these spaces serve as an intermediary ritual field in Buddhist practice. Through ritual separation, liminal experience, and reintegration, practitioners acquire extended lifespan and merit that support the Mahāyāna goal of perfecting the two accumulations and attaining Buddhahood. The findings suggest that religious concepts cross traditions through disassembly, detachment, and functional reconfiguration rather than wholesale transplantation.

Keywords: *pātāla*; Buddhist cosmology; *asura* cave; liminality; esoteric Buddhist ritual

1. Introduction

In the Indian religious and mythological traditions, the “nether space” or “subterranean realm” is commonly referred to as *pātāla*. It constitutes a cosmologically well-structured and functionally distinct unit. According to accounts in the epics and *Purāṇas*, this realm is inhabited by non-human beings such as the *nāgas* and *asuras*, and is also depicted as a place of abundance, treasure, and enjoyment (e.g., *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* [VP], Gupta 2019 2.5.5; *Agni Purāṇa* [AP], Dutt 2019 120.3). In these texts, not only is the hierarchical structure, resident composition, and geographical location of *pātāla* described in detail, but it is also endowed with rich narrative connotations, making it a composite space that combines cosmological stability with mythic expressive power. For this reason, *pātāla* occupies an important position in both the cosmological and mythic-narrative dimensions.

In contrast, although the *nāgas*, *asuras* and other related beings and elements continue to appear in Buddhist literature, the Buddhist cosmological system has never contained a



Academic Editors: Gergana Ruseva and Milena Bratoeva

Received: 2 October 2025

Revised: 19 May 2026

Accepted: 27 May 2026

Published: 22 June 2026

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cosmological unit that fully corresponds to *pātāla*. Although the related spaces are given various forms of expression in different texts, they have never been integrated into a stable and unified cosmological structure. This phenomenon suggests that Buddhism's handling of the dwelling places of *nāgas* and *asuras* is not a simple acceptance or rejection, but involves a more complex conceptual reorganization and contextual transposition. In other words, Buddhism neither systematized nor theorized these spaces as stable cosmological units comparable to *pātāla*, nor did it completely abandon the related spatial imagination and narrative resources.

Existing scholarship has provided an important foundation for this issue. For example, Mayer (2007), through a systematic analysis of early esoteric materials, pointed out that *pātāla* and related subterranean spaces once held certain importance in early Buddhist esoteric traditions, as can be seen in texts such as the *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* and the *Kaṇikrodhavaṃśakumārāboddhisattvasādhanaśāstra* (聖迦拏忿怒金剛童子菩薩成就儀軌經). The related practices were widely transmitted in both Indian and Chinese esoteric Buddhism. However, Mayer also noted that such practices gradually became marginalized in later Tibetan Buddhism, where their significance was more evident in specific practice contexts rather than as part of the cosmological structure. This observation reveals that the conceptions of *pātāla*-related spaces underwent significant shifts in status within Buddhism, but the structural reasons behind this and their modes of expression at different literary levels still require further clarification.

Based on the above observations, this article attempts to re-examine the transformation process of *pātāla*-related spatial conceptions in Buddhism from early Buddhism to early esoteric Buddhism (i.e., *kriyātantra*-type ritual texts), taking the Buddhist theoretical framework centered on the Mount Sumeru cosmology as the background. In terms of materials, this article primarily relies on Pāli literature, Sanskrit literature, and Chinese-translated Buddhist texts, with Tibetan translations used where necessary as supplementary evidence. In terms of research approach, this article does not presuppose a linear transmission model, but focuses on the organizational methods adopted by different traditions when confronting “nether space” and the historical contexts behind these methods. From the analysis of relevant literature, it can be found that, prior to late esoteric Buddhism, despite the continuous influence of the *pātāla* concept, Buddhism did not introduce *pātāla* into its own cosmology as a fixed cosmological unit. Nevertheless, the spatial elements associated with *nāgas* and *asuras* beings did not disappear; instead, they were reconfigured in different contexts and gradually acquired relatively independent narrative and practical functions. It can be said that Buddhism's handling of nether space is neither simple acceptance nor outright rejection, but a form of selective restructuring.

This transformation is particularly evident in early esoteric literature. In the relevant ritual texts, actions such as “entering the *nāga* palace” and “opening the *asura* cave” are no longer merely narrative motifs; rather, they mark the transformation of these spaces into ritual fields directly related to the attainment of *siddhis*, the prolongation of life, and worldly benefits. In these texts, the opening of such spaces depends on the conjunction of mantra, *mudrā*, and prescribed ritual conditions. The process of entering the space is accompanied by clear ritual operations and attainment goals. From this perspective, these spaces function as transitional zones between different states of existence, and the rituals associated with them exhibit the structure of rites of passage.

With such questions in mind, this article will first examine the basic structure of the spaces related to *nāgas* and *asuras* in the Indian religious tradition and their relationship with *pātāla*, revealing their unity at the levels of cosmology and sacred geography; then it will analyze how Buddhist literature treated these spatial concepts without integrating them into an independent cosmological level, and, by examining the translation strategies

of the term *pātāla*, will demonstrate Buddhism's de-emphasis of its cosmological dimension and its narrative-oriented transposition; finally, centering on early esoteric materials, will discuss how these spaces are further transformed into practical fields that can be opened through ritual and entered by practitioners, and also the significance of the rites-of-passage character manifested in this process, thereby providing a concrete case study for understanding mechanisms of conceptual transformation between Buddhism and Indian religious traditions.

2. The Composite Structure of *pātāla*-Related Spaces in Hinduism

In the classical texts of Hinduism, particularly in the *Purāṇas*, there are discussions of the various subterranean realms with varying degrees of detail. However, the descriptions of *pātāla* in the *Purāṇas* also differ in details; even the core concepts are consistent only to a certain degree and are not entirely identical. Nevertheless, we can still roughly identify three core features of the subterranean world *pātāla* that are widely attested in Hindu epic and Purāṇic literature: *pātāla* is a general term for the netherworld, situated beneath the earth and distinct from the hells; it has seven layers, each with its own names; its residents are primarily *asuras* and *nāgas*, sometimes together with other non-human beings; *pātāla* is a world filled with sensual pleasures, rather than a place of suffering (Mayer 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, while discussions of the subterranean realms appear in Buddhist scriptures and treatises, they never provide the kind of explicit and systematic description found in Buddhist accounts of the heavenly realms—such as the exact number of subterranean worlds, their names, characteristics, and so on. Nevertheless, the *asuras* and *nāgas* occupy a certain important position in Buddhism and frequently appear across various scriptures and treatises. Therefore, taking these two classes of beings as the point of entry to investigate Buddhist and Hindu conceptions of *pātāla* and the other dwelling realms of these beings represents a more appropriate approach.

First, in the epics and the *Purāṇas*, the main residents of the subterranean world are described as *nāgas* and the hosts of *asuras*. In the *Mahābhārata*, for example, there is a direct reference calling the subterranean world *nāgaloka* (Mahābhārata 1971–1975 [MBh] 5.96.8)¹. It also mentions that the name of the city at the center of *nāgaloka* is called *pātāla*, and that the *daitya* and *dānava* of the *asura* clan serve as residents (MBh 5.97.1).² In the numerous *Purāṇas*, it is likewise stated that the residents of the subterranean world are primarily the hosts of *asuras* and *nāgas*. As in the *Mahābhārata*, the subterranean world is not depicted as a primitive or barbaric state; rather, it contains numerous cities and leaders of various clans. For example, in the *Mahābhārata*, not only do the *nāgas* clans dwell in great cities, but their city of Bhogavatī is said to be comparable to the city of Amarāvati, the residence of Indra (MBh 5.101.1). It is evident that these cities are filled with joy and abundance. Not only the *nāgas*, but also various *asuras* dwell in remarkably wondrous cities. For example, the famous Golden City Hiranyapura is said in the *Mahābhārata* to be located in the depths of *pātāla*, inhabited by the *Daitya* and *Dānava* clans of the *asuras*, and constructed by Viśvakarmā through his illusory power *māyā* (MBh 5.98.1–2). The city is further described as magnificent and exquisite, radiant with various jewels (MBh 5.98.9–10). Furthermore, Hiranyapura is not merely a magnificent city; it also has supernatural mobility. It states in the *Vana Parva* states that the city can move through the sky and submerge in the waters, demonstrating very distinct special abilities (MBh 3.170.23–24).

Different *Purāṇas* place varying emphases on the depiction of the subterranean world, and the degree of detail also differs. Among them, the *Vāyu Purāṇa*'s account of the subterranean world focuses particularly on the aspect of the various cities within it. For example, regarding the first netherworld layer *atala*, although there is no detailed description of the life of the beings dwelling therein, it lists the names and residents of more than ten cities

(Mitra 1880 [VāP] 50.15–19). For the other subterranean worlds, the *Vāyu Purāṇa* also employs similar expressions, placing the emphasis on the enumeration of cities. In addition, in their descriptions of the subterranean world, most of the *Purāṇas* state that it contains a large number of treasures and is filled with enjoyment. In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, not only is the magnificence of the subterranean world described, but it is even stated that the subterranean world is more splendid and marvelous than the heavenly realms (VP 2.5.5). Even in some *Purāṇas* that contain very few descriptions of the subterranean world, the notion that the subterranean world is a land of bliss is still expressed. For example, in the *Agni Purāṇa*, the description of the subterranean world consists of only a few sentences, one of which states that the subterranean world contains “lands of various treasures interwoven with black, yellow, and red colors, white like sugar, and shining like mountain gold; on these pleasant lands, the *asuras* and other beings all attain peace and happiness” (AP 120.3). From these accounts, it is evident that the subterranean world constitutes an important unit in the cosmology of Hinduism. It is therefore a highly structured cosmological realm markedly urbanized in spatial form. It possesses a clear organizational structure and represents a civilized space endowed with ruling authority, technological capability, and social order. Most of its residents live in highly urbanized and architecturally elaborate cities and enjoy lives of abundance and pleasure; it can be said to have been constructed as an alternative world similar to the heavenly realms. Yet this world also manifests “otherness” in many respects. For example, the *Hiraṇyapura* mentioned above can move freely and fly, and in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* it is further stated that the subterranean world is illuminated by the jewels on the heads of *nāgas* rather than by the natural light sources familiar in the human world, among other distinctive features (BhP 5.24.31). In summary, the subterranean world *pātāla* inhabited by beings such as the *nāgas* and *asuras* is, within the Hindu cosmological view, a joyful space located beneath the earth, parallel to the heavenly realms and structurally well-organized. It is filled with treasures and magnificent cities, possesses a complete social and ruling order, and its beings enjoy lives of abundance and pleasure. At the same time, it is distinguished from the mundane world by heterogeneous features such as illusory powers and supernatural abilities, thereby acquiring a distinct mythic character.

However, if one were to understand the living spaces of beings such as the *nāgas* and *asuras* solely on this basis as a “subterranean world” completely enclosed within a cosmological schema, this would be insufficient. For in Hinduism and, more broadly, in the Indian religious and cultural tradition, the abodes of these beings are frequently conceived in another way: through concrete geographical features of the human world—such as rivers, mountain caves, grottoes, abysses, and wilderness areas—they become perceptible, enterable, or imaginable within the empirical world. This conception is even clearer in the accounts of the *nāgas*. The associations and legends linking the *nāgas* with various actual bodies of water are innumerable in Indian culture. For example, in the *Harivaṃśa*, the narrator explicitly states that he knows the *nāga* Kāliya who “dwells in the deep pool of the Yamunā,” and further explains that he took refuge there out of fear of *Garuḍa* (Harivaṃśa 1969–1971 [HV] 45.7). In the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, after subduing Kāliya, Kṛṣṇa commands him not to remain in the Yamunā any longer, but to immediately take his family and proceed to the great ocean (VP 5.7.77). From the rivers to the great ocean, it is evident that in the most representative Vaiṣṇava myth of Kṛṣṇa–Kāliya, the abode of the *nāga* is located in the actual water bodies of the real world. Furthermore, in the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, the city Bhogavatī of the *nāga* king Vāsuki is regarded as a holy site located at the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, where bathing brings great merit (MBh 3.83.80–81). The most noteworthy point is that the *nāga* city Bhogavatī, which is usually imbued with mythic significance, is directly situated in the sacred geography of a real river confluence. This is

evidently another description of the *nāga* living space, or rather, real bodies of water and the mythic *nāgaloka* overlap through a process of sacralization. Various related narratives continuously connect the *nāgas* with rivers, lakes, springs, ponds, oceans, and other water bodies, demonstrating that the *nāgas* are not merely alien beings dwelling in a distant netherworld, but are persistently regarded as the masters and guardians of water bodies. Consequently, in the narratives, when people encounter a *nāga* or enter the realm where *nāgas* dwell, they often do not first arrive at a purely abstract “subterranean world”; rather, they first confront a specific pool, river, sea, or abyss in the real world, from which these geographical features open out into another layer of space. In other words, water bodies are not merely subsidiary symbols of the *nāgas*, but precisely the primary mode in which their living space manifests in the real world. From this perspective, the relationship between *nāgaloka* and water bodies is not one of “true abode” versus “temporary haunt,” but rather two different conceptions of the *nāgas’* place of life.

Although the situation of the *asuras* is not entirely identical to that of the *nāgas*, there is considerable structural similarity. On the one hand, in the epics and *Purāṇas*, the *asura* clans are clearly placed in the subterranean world; on the other hand, they are also linked to the real world through locations such as caves. Although the association between the *asuras* and caves is not as clear in the epics and *Purāṇas* as the association between the *nāgas* and water bodies, traces of it can still be found. For example, in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa*, Hanumān and the monkey troop enter, in the Vindhya, a cave constructed by the *dānava māya* through his illusory power *māyā*; this cave is filled with gold, silver, and various exquisite foods and objects (Vālmīki 1965 [VR] 4.49–50). Although the cave is not occupied by *asuras* at the time of the episode, the passage nevertheless preserves a clear association between *asura* clans and cave spaces. Traces of this can also be found in the *Purāṇas*. For example, in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *daitya* and *dānava asura* clans living in the subterranean world *rasātala* are described as *bileśayāḥ iva vasanti*, that is, as living like beings who dwell in caves (BhP 5.24.30). Of course, this statement should be understood in two senses. On the one hand, as stated in this verse, it is because the *asura* clans submitted to the divine majesty of the great god Hari; on the other hand, it also describes a mode of living of the *asura* clans. In Śrīdhara Svāmī’s *Bhāvārtha-dīpikā*, the interpretation of this line is *bileśayāḥ sarpā iva* (Śāstrī 1966, p. 535), that is, “cave-dwellers like serpents,” which can serve as supporting evidence. Although the passage describes living conditions in the subterranean world *Rasātala*, it already links that world with the imagery of cave-dwelling. Another example appears in the *Harivaṃśa*, where the following phrase occurs: *nayato yādavān ghorān guhām śaṭpurasañjñitām*, which means “(the *asura* king Nikumbha) is leading the fierce *yādavas* into the cave named Śaṭpura.” (HV App. I, 29B.245). A struggle then takes place both inside and outside this cave. From the setting of this episode, it can be seen that the *asura* clans are associated with *guhā*, that is, caves, or in other words, caves serve as the entrance to the living area of the *asura* clans. Although this episode clearly bears the character of Purāṇic literature and should be regarded as a relatively late development, it also shows that the association between the *asura* dwelling space and caves is becoming increasingly evident. All these examples indicate that, in the Indian cultural context, the abodes of beings such as the *nāgas* and the *asuras* are not simply a kind of “other world” located underground, but maintain a certain degree of connection with the present real world.

The dual presentation of the dwelling spaces of the *nāgas* and the *asuras* in the Hindu tradition is not a mere accidental juxtaposition, but rather an embodiment of the mechanism of sacred geography. Here the relevant category is *tīrtha*, a sacralized “crossing place,” often marked by river confluences and other geographically accessible sites of divine or mythic presence. As Diana L. Eck explains in *India: A Sacred Geography* (2012): “the word *tīrtha* is primarily associated with those crossing places that bring the traditions of

the gods and goddesses, heroes, heroines, and sages to living embodiment in India's geography" (Eck 2012, p. 10). In other words, the sacred is not merely abstract, but can "take form, be located, and be perceived" in specific geographical locations. Eck further points out, "the sacred takes form, is located, and is apprehended" (Eck 2012, p. 29). Within this framework, rivers, springs, caves, and the like in the real world are in fact the concrete manifestations in everyday life of subterranean worlds such as *pātāla*, *nāgaloka*, and *rasātala*, rather than a separate and parallel independent system. From this it can be seen that, in the conceptual system of Hinduism, the dwelling spaces of beings such as the *nāgas* and the *asuras* present two interrelated but distinct dimensions. The first is the mythic dimension: the living spaces of these beings possess clear hierarchical divisions, urban structures, ruling order, and attributes of enjoyment, manifesting as highly organized otherworldly realms. As these traditions developed, these spaces came to be placed beneath the earth as the seven-layered *pātāla* netherworld, thereby acquiring a stable cosmological structure. The second dimension is associated with the real world: these beings are not confined to an abstract subterranean realm; rather, concrete geographical forms such as rivers, lakes, seas, springs, abysses, mountain caves, and grottoes serve as identifiable passages and manifestations in the human world. The former constitutes their fundamental mythic belonging, while the latter constitutes the way this belonging unfolds at the empirical level. For this reason, the "nether space" in Hinduism, or the space in which *asuras* and *nāgas* dwell, is not merely a unit within cosmology, but a composite spatial form that simultaneously integrates cosmological structure and concrete geographical anchoring. It is precisely in this sense that the discussion of these spaces should not be limited to whether they existed as cosmological units or how they evolved, but should focus on how this composite structure is organized and handled in different contexts.

3. Buddhism's Reorganization of the Dwelling Places of *nāgas* and *asuras*

From the discussion above, it is clear that once *pātāla* had become a mature and stable cosmological unit in the Hindu tradition, the conception of the dwelling places of *asuras* and *nāgas* became more systematized, with their mythic and empirical dimensions essentially fixed as the concepts of the "underground" and the "surface world." However, the notion of *asuras* already appears in the *Rgveda*, and the word *nāga* appears in the *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvaveda*. Therefore, against this cultural background, Buddhist texts likewise addressed these issues. In Buddhist scriptures, the living spaces of *asuras* and *nāgas* are likewise presented in the two dimensions mentioned above: a mythic dimension and a dimension associated with the empirical world. First, in the relatively early Buddhist scriptures, the living spaces of the *asuras* and the *nāgas* are primarily associated with water bodies, especially the great ocean. For example, in *Samyutta Nikāya*, when the Buddha uses the growth of a *nāga* as a metaphor, he links the stages of the *nāga*'s growth from the Himalaya to the great ocean (Samyutta-Nikāya 1884–1898 [SN] 46.1).³ Moreover, in *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, not only does the *asura* king Pahārāda explicitly state that the *asuras* delight in dwelling in the great ocean, but the various descriptions of the great ocean also mention rivers such as the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā (Aṅguttara-Nikāya 1885–1900 [AN] 8.19). This indicates that the "great ocean" discussed here is still based on the actual ocean of the empirical world rather than on an ocean primarily characterized by mythic features. In early Buddhist scriptures, therefore, the first layer of understanding concerning the abodes of *nāgas* and *asuras* is clearly empirical: the actual continuous hydrological system constitutes the living environment of the *nāgas* and *asuras*; their living spaces are closely linked with the mountain-water source system and take the ocean as their optimal residence.

At the same time, however, Buddhism also recorded the mythic dimension of the *nāgas* and the *asuras* at an early stage. For example, SN 11.4 records the war between the *asuras* and the *devas*, and the story recorded in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Mahāvagga*, in which the Mucalinda *nāgarājā* emerges from his own palace and uses his own body to shelter the Buddha from wind and rain, all demonstrate that Buddhism already possessed records of the mythic dimension of these two beings at an early stage (Vinaya Piṭaka 1879–1883 I.3). Moreover, Buddhist texts also depict the living environments of these two classes of beings as rich and splendid. For example, in the “*Nāga and Garuḍa Chapter*” of the *Scripture on the Record of the World* within the Chinese translation of the *Dirghāgama* (considered to derive from the *Dharmaguptaka* tradition), it is stated that at the bottom of the great ocean and between Mount Sumeru and Mount Khadira there are numerous *nāga* palaces. These palaces are surrounded by seven layers of walls, railings, nets, and rows of trees, are built from the seven treasures, and are accompanied by countless birds singing in harmony; they are described as extraordinarily magnificent (CBETA 2025.R3, T01, no. 1, p. 127a28–b28). In the *Asura Chapter*, it is also recounted that the *asura* city is located in the great ocean. The palaces, streets, gardens, and other features of the city are likewise described as magnificent and vast. It is said to be constructed from a large quantity of gold, silver, and jewels, and the city is peaceful, joyful, and pure (CBETA 2025.R3, T01, no. 1, pp. 129b2–130a29). Indeed, in the vast corpus of Buddhist scriptures, the descriptions of the living environments of the *asuras* and the *nāgas* contain numerous details, and sometimes present different details depending on the beings or settings under discussion. However, as stated above, Buddhism’s depictions of the living environments of the *asuras* and the *nāgas* likewise possess the two dimensions of mythic and empirical. In this respect, Buddhist texts, like the Hindu materials discussed in the previous section, also maintain the conception that these two classes of beings possess great power and that their dwelling places are extremely magnificent and abundant.

However, Buddhism’s conception of the dwelling environments of these two beings is not entirely identical to that of Hinduism, especially at the cosmological level. In Hinduism the abodes of beings such as the *nāgas* and the *asuras* are incorporated into the seven-layered *pātāla* netherworld cosmological structure and form a composite structure together with mountains and other geographical features of the empirical world. In Buddhism, however, no such integration is carried out. The accounts of the dwelling places of the *nāgas* and the *asuras* vary considerably. For example, in the *Dirghāgama*, *Scripture on the Record of the World* (世記經)—which is considered to derive from the *Dharmaguptaka* transmission—the *nāgas* and the *asuras* are both said to dwell in the great ocean, and *nāgas* are also said to reside between Mount Sumeru and Mount Khadira. In the *Sūtra on the Causes and Beginning of the World* (起世因本經), which is considered to derive from the *Sarvāstivāda* transmission, the locations of the dwelling places of the *nāgas* and the *asuras* are basically the same as in the *Scripture on the Record of the World* (世記經), but the description is more detailed: it specifies which *asura* kings’ cities are located in the great oceans surrounding the four sides of Mount Sumeru, as well as their sizes and internal structures, and so on (CBETA 2025.R3, T01, no. 24, pp. 337c16–338b12). In the *Abhidharma* period, as doctrinal systems continued to develop, accounts of the dwelling places of beings such as *asuras* and *nāgas* also became more elaborate along with the maturation of Buddhist cosmology. For example, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the comprehensive compendium of the *Sarvāstivāda* school, presents a dynamic account of the changing abode of the *asuras*. It states that the *asuras* originally dwelt at the summit of Mount Sumeru. As heavenly beings died and were reborn at the summit of Mount Sumeru, the *asura* hosts gradually retreated. There are two accounts of where the *asuras* ultimately retreated: one states that they retreated to the great salty ocean, and the other that they retreated to the empty spaces

within Mount Sumeru. When questioners inquire why the scriptures say that the *asuras* dwell in the great ocean, the reply is that the *asura* hosts live in the ocean, while the *asura* kings live in the empty spaces within Mount Sumeru (CBETA 2025.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 868b8–23). There is no detailed discussion concerning the *nāgas*, but the basic view that they reside in the ocean is maintained. For instance, it is stated that the *nāga* kings have long dwelt in the ocean (CBETA 2025.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 366b24). Such cosmological conceptions did not undergo much change in the course of Buddhism's own theoretical development, so much so that even in the *Lotus Sūtra* (妙法蓮華經), it is still mentioned that the *asuras* dwell by the great ocean (CBETA 2025.R3, T09, no. 262, p. 48a21).

From the discussion above, it can be seen that Buddhism does indeed discuss the locations of the dwelling places of beings such as *asuras* and *nāgas*. Its understanding of their living spaces can also be viewed in terms of mythic and empirical dimensions. At the empirical level, the wider Buddhist tradition acknowledges that they may sometimes live in the real world, or that their living spaces have connections with the real world. At the mythic level, Buddhism likewise holds that their dwelling places are magnificent and abundant, constructed from gold, silver, and various jewels, and that these communities possess ruling elites. Buddhist texts also assign dwelling spaces to these groups, placing them within areas belonging to the main cosmological structure, such as the areas between Mount Sumeru and the surrounding great oceans. However, Buddhism did not incorporate them into an independent cosmological unit comparable to *pātāla*. The habitats of these groups are subordinated to the overall cosmological framework rather than constituting major structural components of the cosmology. For example, although the *Abhidharmakośa* (俱舍論) has a dedicated chapter that systematically expounds the Buddhist cosmological structure, it does not clearly record the specific dwelling places of the *asura* and the *nāga* clans. Given the importance of the *Abhidharmakośa* for *Abhidharma*-period Buddhist cosmology, this absence also supports the present argument.

However, it must be made clear that although Buddhism did not establish places such as the *nāga* palace as independent structural units within its cosmology, Buddhist narratives concerning *nāgaloka*, *nāga* palaces, *asura* palaces, and related spaces did not cease to develop. On the contrary, they were repeatedly discussed in different periods and traditions and acquired considerable religious significance. Relatively speaking, before the development of esoteric Buddhism, Buddhist discussions of interaction with *nāga* palaces and *nāgaloka* were far more extensive than those concerning the realm of the *asuras*. Already in early Buddhist narrative literature, the *nāga* palace appears as a place filled with treasures and capable of being entered. In the *Vidhurapaṇḍita-jātaka*, for example, Vidhura enters the *nāga* palace, teaches the *dharma* to the *nāga* king and queen, and eventually receives a jewel when he returns to the human world. This story, however, does not give a precise location for the *nāga* palace, but only states that Vidhura was brought by Puṇṇaka into the palace of the *nāga* king (Vidhurapaṇḍita-jātaka, Ja 545; Fausbøll 1877–1896, vol. VI, pp. 255–329). In the *Campeyya-jātaka*, by contrast, the location of a *nāga* palace is given more explicitly: between the kingdoms of Aṅga and *Magadha* there is a river named Campā, and there was a *nāga* abode there. (Campeyya-jātaka, Ja 506; Fausbøll 1877–1896, vol. IV, p. 454).⁴ This *nāga* palace, too, is a place that can be entered, and the story contains extensive interactions between the king of *Magadha* and the *nāga* king Campeyya.

One narrative motif that deserves particular attention is the veneration of the Buddha's relics in *nāga* palaces. The *Aśokāvadāna*, for instance, recounts that when King Aśoka sought to distribute the bodily relics of the *Buddha*, he opened the *stūpa* built by Ajātaśatru and took out the relics. When he arrived at Rāmagrāma, however, the *nāgas* brought him into their own abode. In the end, Aśoka did not take away the relics, which continued to be worshipped by the *nāgas* (Mukhopadhyaya 1963, p. 52). This motif was further developed

in the Pāli Sri Lankan historical tradition. The *Mahāvamsa* records that one *doṇa* of relics from Rāmagrāma was taken to *nāgaloka* and was ultimately enshrined in the Mahāthūpa on Laṅkādīpa. Later, the Rāmagrāma *stūpa* on the bank of the Ganges was destroyed by a flood; the relic casket entered the sea, was discovered by the *nāgas*, and was brought into the Mañjērīka *nāgabhavana* (Mahāvamsa 31.18–29; Geiger 1908, pp. 247–48). When Duṭṭhagāmaṇī built the Great *Stūpa*, the *yati* Soṇuttara descended beneath the earth, entered the *nāgamandira*, and retrieved the relic casket from the realm of the *nāga* king so that it could be enshrined in the Mahāthūpa (Mahāvamsa 31.45–68; Geiger 1908, pp. 249–52).

In this series of stories, *nāgaloka* is not only a place possessing various treasures; it also assumes the function of preserving and protecting Buddhist sacred objects. This idea was further developed in Mahāyāna Buddhist narratives, where *nāgaloka* became a place in which Mahāyāna scriptures were preserved and from which they could be transmitted. For example, in the Chinese Buddhist *Biography of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva* (龍樹菩薩傳), Nāgārjuna is said to have entered the *nāga* palace in the sea and read a large number of Mahāyāna scriptures (CBETA 2025.R3, T50, no. 2047b, p. 186a8–14). In the literature of the Chinese Huayan school, the transmission of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is likewise attributed to Nāgārjuna's entry into the *nāga* palace and his bringing the scripture out from there (CBETA 2025.R3, T35, no. 1733, p. 122b12–21). Tibetan Buddhist historical traditions also preserve narrative links between Nāgārjuna, the *nāgaloka*, and Mahāyāna scriptures. Unlike the Chinese Buddhist tradition, however, Tibetan Buddhism generally holds that what Nāgārjuna brought back was not the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, but scriptures belonging to the *Prajñāpāramitā* corpus. Bu ston's Chos 'byung narrates that Nāgārjuna went to the *nāgaloka* at the invitation of the *nāgas*, taught the *dharma* there, and brought back *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* together with several shorter texts (Bu ston, Chos 'byung; Bu ston Rin chen grub 1965–1971, p. 24: fols. 1.a–212.a, esp. Nāgārjuna biography). This tradition was further developed in the sacred geography of Svayambhū in Nepal. There, Śāntipur is described as one of the entrances to the *nāgaloka*, and *Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā* is further linked to scriptures brought back by Nāgārjuna from that realm. According to the *Shing-kun dkar-chag* cited by Dowman, Śāntipur contains three tunnels, one of which leads to the *Nāga* Realm; the same tradition also states that the sixteen-volume *Prajñāpāramitā*, brought by Nāgārjuna from the *Nāga* Realm, is preserved at Tham Bahī in Kathmandu (Dowman 1981, p. 216). It is therefore evident that the Buddhist motif of obtaining treasures from the *nāga* palace gradually developed into the theme that relics, scriptures, and other sacred objects were preserved in *nāga* palaces. This development also provided a theoretical basis for explaining the later appearance of Mahāyāna scriptures.

The examples discussed above further show that later Buddhist developments of *nāgaloka* continued to preserve the coexistence of mythic and empirical dimensions. On the mythic level, the *nāga* palace is a wealthy, treasure-filled, otherworldly space; at the same time, it is not a space completely separate from the empirical world. Rather, it manifests itself in various ways within the real world, or more precisely, the mythic and empirical dimensions of the *nāgaloka* are two aspects of a single interrelated spatial conception.

Therefore, the comparison shows that the difference between Buddhist and Hindu treatments of *asuras* and *nāgas* dwelling spaces does not lie primarily in their recognition of mythic and empirical dimensions, but in the way the mythic dimension is constructed cosmologically. Of course, it should be made clear here that the discussion in this article is mainly limited to the construction and presentation of cosmology. It does not analyze further interpretations of cosmology arising from differences in doctrine—for instance, the influence of Buddhist karma theory on views of *asuras* and *nāgas* and on their modes of dwelling, or the differences between these views and Hindu ones. Such matters fall outside the scope of this article.

4. Underground Space and the Concept of *pātāla* in Buddhist Literature

As discussed above, although Buddhism's conceptions of the mythic and empirical dimensions concerning beings such as *asuras* and *nāgas* are similar to those in Hinduism, Buddhism did not construct the dwelling places of *asuras* and *nāgas* as an underground world comparable to *pātāla*. The further question, therefore, is whether Buddhism developed other cosmological conceptions of an underground world that did not incorporate *asuras* and *nāgas*, and whether these conceptions exerted any structural influence on Buddhist cosmology. These are issues that require further discussion.

First, from a cosmological perspective, the specific geographical locations of the hells and other realms remain largely underexamined in the Pāli Canon. In the extant Chinese translations of the *Āgama* scriptures, however, there are various views expressed regarding the structure beneath the earth. It is generally held that there are multiple layers beneath the earth, although the order of these layers differs in different accounts. For example, the *Ekottarika Āgama* (增一阿含經), which is considered to derive from the Mahāsāṃghika or Dharmaguptaka transmission, states that the sequence beneath the earth, from top to bottom, is earth, water, fire, wind, and the *vajra* wheel (CBETA 2025.R3, T02, no. 125, p. 753c12–17). Moreover, no living spaces for various types of beings are arranged beneath the earth; even the hells are located between the two rings of *Cakravāḍa*. It is also held that without the shelter of the *Cakravāḍa*, *Jambudvīpa* would be filled with an unbearable stench. A similar view appears in the *Scripture on the Record of the World* (世記經) within the *Dīrghāgama*, which is considered to derive from the Dharmaguptaka transmission. However, this scripture states that beneath the earth is water, and beneath the water is wind. Nor are there dwelling places for living beings beneath the earth; the numerous hells are situated at the edge of the earth, in the dark region between two great mountains. Furthermore, without the shelter of the great mountains, the fierce winds from the hells could even blow into other regions (CBETA 2025.R2, T01, no. 1, pp. 121b29–125c9). A similar view is also expressed in the *Lokasthāna Abhidharma* (立世阿毘曇論), which is later than the *Āgama* scriptures. It holds that there is no world of living beings beneath the earth, and that the numerous hells are located at the edge of the earth (CBETA 2025.R2, T32, no. 1644, p. 173b28–c1). This type of cosmological conception holds that beneath the earth there is merely an objective structure, and there are no living spaces for beings such as those in the hells or the *preta* realm.

However, in *Abhidharma* Buddhist texts, a different conception emerges. Although this view accepts an objective structure beneath the earth consisting of the wind wheel, water wheel, and golden wheel, it also allows for spaces inhabited by living beings. The various hells are located primarily beneath the earth. In addition, it is considered that the *preta* hosts originally lived underground as well. Representative examples are the *Abhidharmakośa* and the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. In the *Abhidharmakośa*, it is stated that the hells are located at a depth of twenty thousand *yojanas* below the earth (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* of Vasubandhu 1975 [AKBh] III.58). The *preta* hosts originally dwelt in the Kingdom of *Yama*, which is located five hundred *yojanas* below this southern *Jambudvīpa*. Later, they gradually dispersed and came to reside in various places (AKBh III, ad vv. 59–60). The *Mahāvibhāṣā* also holds a similar view, though it provides a more detailed account. In addition to stating that the *pretas* moved from the Kingdom of *Yama* beneath southern *Jambudvīpa* to various places, it further differentiates the dwelling places of poor and wealthy *pretas* (CBETA 2025.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 867b4–12). It is evident that, as sectarian Buddhist schools refined Buddhist cosmological theory, conceptions of subterranean realms had already appeared. However, it was not treated as an important component of Buddhist cosmology, and it basically did not absorb the details from the Hindu *pātāla* to construct an underground realm of bliss corresponding to the heavenly realms; instead, these subterranean

realms served primarily within Buddhist theories of *karma* and rebirth. In these discussions, cosmological aspects receive little attention: there are few descriptions of the structure and levels of these realms, while karmic causes and consequences are treated in detail. This phenomenon is even more evident in the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* (正法念處經). This scripture also explicitly states that the *preta* realm is beneath the earth and provides a detailed introduction to thirty-six kinds of *preta*. However, the text is more concerned with explaining the causes and conditions for the rebirth of these thirty-six kinds of *preta* into the *preta* realm, and does not discuss the cosmological structure of the *preta* realm or other cosmological matters. Finally, it points out that practitioners should observe these causes and conditions, diligently practice, so as to avoid being reborn there in the future (CBETA 2025.R2, T17, no. 721, pp. 91a27–103a17). This is clearly focused on doctrinal instruction and moral edification rather than cosmological discussion. Therefore, although during the period of sectarian Buddhism some schools acknowledged the existence of beings and living spaces beneath the earth, their approach is similar to the one discussed above, in which *asura* palaces and *nāga* palaces are placed in the great ocean: that is, these texts do not construct such realms as independent cosmological units. Instead, they place such realms within the overall cosmological framework, and the details of their locations and distances still vary across different scriptures. For example, the different accounts that place the hells inside the *Cakravāḍa* or beneath the earth are both arrangements made on the basis of the cosmological system.

The conception of an underground world that did not form a stable cosmology appears even less stable in other texts. For example, in Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, the locations of the hells, *preta*, and other realms are often not clearly stated. Even in a text such as the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* (瑜伽師地論) that explicitly states that the hells are beneath the earth and gives their distance below the earth, the locations of the *pretas* and *asuras* are merely mentioned in passing without specifying their positions (CBETA 2025.R3, T30, no. 1579, p. 294c17–21). However, the conception that there is space beneath the earth still exists in Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. In many Mahāyāna texts, there are various accounts of objects or beings emerging from beneath the earth, and these accounts are highly diverse. The most famous description is that of the “*Bodhisattvas* of the Earth” in the *Lotus Sūtra* (妙法蓮華經). In the *Lotus Sūtra*, after the *bodhisattvas* from other worlds hear Śākyamuni Buddha preach the *Lotus Sūtra*, they express their willingness to expound and protect this scripture in this world. They are refused by Śākyamuni Buddha, who states that in this *Sahā* world there are already six hundred thousand myriads of *koṭis* of Gaṅgā sands of *bodhisattvas* who can protect this scripture, and there is no need for *bodhisattvas* from other worlds. After the Buddha finishes speaking, countless *bodhisattvas* and their numerous retinues simultaneously emerge from underground. Maitreya and the other *bodhisattvas* all express astonishment at this scene, not knowing where these *bodhisattvas* come from. The Buddha explains to them that these *bodhisattvas* all dwell in the empty space beneath this *Sahā* world (CBETA 2025.R1, T09, no. 262, pp. 39c19–41b5). Because the *Lotus Sutra* is a highly influential scripture, especially in Chinese Buddhism, this passage has been subject to numerous interpretations since ancient times. From Maitreya’s attitude in the scripture, it can be known that the phenomenon of *bodhisattvas* emerging from the earth is not a common occurrence even in Buddhist scriptures. Therefore, there have been many interpretations of this phenomenon from ancient times to the present. For example, Zhiyi (智顗), the founder of the Tiantai school and one of the most important Chinese exegetes of the *Lotus Sutra*, interpreted the “below” from which the *Bodhisattvas* of the Earth emerge as: The “below” refers to the abyss of the Dharma-nature, the ultimate ground of the profound principle; hence it is called “below.” What is below does not belong to “this,” and what is in the air does not belong to “that”; neither “this” nor “that” is

the Middle Way. Emerging from this, it is neither above nor below, neither in the air nor on the ground, but abides in the air; this too is the Middle Way (CBETA 2025.R1, T34, no. 1718, p. 125a4–7).⁵ It is evident that Master Zhiyi did not regard the “empty space below” as a cosmological level of space, but rather interpreted this passage in the Lotus Sutra from the perspective of abstract doctrinal principles. In addition, there are many other interpretations. For example, it can be understood as an expression of the *Lotus Sūtra*’s emphasis on the *Sahā* world and its emphasis on society (Kanno 2010, pp. 108–28), or it has been regarded as a metaphor for the rise in the grassroots Buddhist movement, and so on (Moon 2004, p. 160). Interpretations of the *Bodhisattvas* of the Earth are highly diverse. However, contemporary explanations of this passage generally proceed from abstract and metaphorical perspectives, rather than regarding it as a text with cosmological significance. In the scripture, the Buddha also states that these *bodhisattvas* come from the empty space beneath the earth, showing that this type of Mahāyāna text and its commentarial tradition tends to transform the “below” into a space of doctrinal meaning rather than continuing to treat it as a concrete cosmological level.

Therefore, Buddhist scriptures and treatises present a complex range of conceptions of subterranean space. If one speaks from the perspective of the notion of “underground space,” it is true that Buddhism has held such a conception from the *Abhidharma*-period treatises through to the Mahāyāna scriptures. However, it has not systematically constructed it within its own cosmology, reflecting an attitude of partial acceptance, but not full adoption or systematic cosmological construction.

If the direct analysis of the Buddhist scriptures and treatises themselves may still reflect the development of Buddhism’s own theory, then examining the usage of the term *pātāla* allows us to see more clearly Buddhism’s attitude toward this concept from Hinduism. First, in SN 36.4 of the Pāli Canon, there is the following passage:

Assutavā bhikkhave puthujjano yaṃ vācaṃ bhāsatī Atthi mahāsamudde pātālo ti; taṃ kho panetaṃ bhikkhave assutavā puthujjano asantaṃ avijjamānaṃ evaṃ vācaṃ bhāsatī Atthi mahāsamudde pātālo ti.

Sārīrikānaṃ kho etaṃ bhikkhave dukkhānaṃ vedanānaṃ adhivacanaṃ yad idaṃ pātālo ti.

This may be translated as:

“Monks, the uninstructed ordinary person speaks thus: ‘There is a *pātāla* in the great ocean.’ But, monks, when the uninstructed ordinary person says, “There is a *pātāla* in the great ocean,” he speaks of something unreal and non-existent. ‘There is a *pātāla* in the great ocean’ — that is what the uninstructed ordinary person says.

‘*Pātāla*’ is a designation for painful bodily feelings.”

From this scripture, it can be seen that although the cosmological construction of *pātāla* was not yet fully developed at that time, the related concept must have already existed. The scripture negates it and provides an abstract and theoretical explanation, turning it into a metaphor or symbol within Buddhist theory. This also accords with the attitude of early Buddhist scriptures toward the external material world. Early Buddhist scriptures mainly established a spiritual cosmological conception in order to convey the teachings, exhort the faithful, or illustrate the different potentials of human consciousness (Matsunaga and Matsunaga 1972, p. 39). This is also consistent with the expressions in the Chinese translations of the *Dirghāgama* and *Ekottarika Āgama* mentioned above. Furthermore, in the *Milinda-pañha*, which was probably formed between the first century BCE and the first century CE, there is the following passage:

mahāsamuddato Pātālamukhaṃ pavisati, api nu taṃ udakaṃ Pātālamukha-gataṃ paṇivattitvā mahāsamuddaṃ paviseyya (Trenckner 1880, p. 286)

This may be translated as:

From the great ocean it enters the mouth of Pātāla. Would that water, having gone to the mouth of Pātāla, turn back and re-enter the great ocean?

When viewed in context, although this sentence uses the flow of water as a metaphor, the term *pātāla* at this time does not necessarily refer to the fully developed cosmological concept of the seven-layered netherworld found in Hinduism; it can quite naturally be interpreted as “the abyss in the ocean.” However, the term *pātāla* here does indeed carry the meaning of a large subterranean space capable of receiving the inflow of seawater. This usage stands in direct contrast with SN 36.4: in SN 36.4 the *pātāla* that is the abyss in the ocean is negated and given an abstract theoretical explanation by the Buddha, whereas the *Milindapañha* uses the image without rejecting it. This represents a conceptual shift. In the *Mahāvastu*, there is a story about the *Bodhisattva* competing with princes in archery, which contains the following passage:

evaṃ saptatālo bodhisatvenaikaśareṇa nistādetvā sāpi bherī nistāditā.

bherī nistādetvā rasātalam praviṣṭo. devamānuṣyeḥi hakkāram muktaṃ.

devatānāṃ sahasrehi ca antarikṣāto divyaṃ kusumavarṣaṃ oṣṣṭaṃ (Marciniak 2020, p. 105)

This may be translated as:

Thus the Bodhisattva, having pierced seven palm trees with a single arrow, also pierced the drum. Having pierced the drum, [the arrow] entered rasātala. Gods and humans uttered a cry of astonishment, and from the sky a thousand deities showered divine flowers.

In this account, the “*rasātala*” into which the *Bodhisattva* shoots the arrow is a name for a netherworld space that clearly carries cosmological connotations in both of the great epics. However, there is no further description of it. In the *Sanḥabhedavastu*, the record of this story is slightly different and uses the following wording:

sa nārācaḥ pātālam praviṣṭaḥ; nāgair uddhṛtaḥ (Gnoli 1977, p. 60)

This may be translated as:

That arrow entered pātāla; it was retrieved by the *nāgas*.

Here not only is *pātāla* used, but it is also explicitly stated that the *nāgas* retrieved the arrow. This makes it clear that *pātāla* in this context carries the meaning of the subterranean world found in Hindu traditions. However, when we compare this with the Chinese translation of the text produced in the Tang dynasty, we find that the Chinese version renders it as: “and having passed through the earth wheel it again entered the water’s edge. At that time the *nāga* king immediately pulled out the arrow” (CBETA 2025.R3, T24, no. 1450, p. 111b23–24).⁶ It is evident that the translator Yijing (義淨) at that time rendered *pātāla* as “the water’s edge,” almost completely removing the rich cosmological connotations of the subterranean world contained in *pātāla*. Yet Yijing actually stayed in India for nearly fourteen years, so it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of the concept of the subterranean world associated with *pātāla*.

This phenomenon also persists in Mahāyāna scriptures. We should pay attention to an important Buddhist text, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* (大乘莊嚴寶王經). A passage in this scripture revolves around the salvific deeds of Avalokiteśvara, in which the *asura* king Bali is the central object of Avalokiteśvara’s salvific activity, and his experience and transformation are particularly significant. The scripture states that the *asura* king Bali followed

non-Buddhist teachings and committed many unwholesome deeds, especially preparing to sacrifice many people. At that time, Nārāyaṇa, manifesting as a dwarf *brāhmaṇa*, came to see him. Using the pretext of “begging for land with two steps,” he gradually approached. The *asura* king agreed to grant him three steps of land and performed the ritual of bestowing the land with a golden vase filled with pure water. At this moment, the *brāhmaṇa* (that is, Nārāyaṇa) revealed his true form. The *asura* king fell to the ground in terror, and those who had been imprisoned were thereby freed. Although Bali had not committed the act of killing, his unwholesome *karma* still caused him and his retinue to be trapped in an iron cave and suffer (Vaidya 1961, pp. 270–75). This story is clearly derived from the famous Indian myth of Viṣṇu’s three steps that expelled the *asura* Bali. The core details of the story, such as Viṣṇu (that is, Nārāyaṇa), the three steps, the dwarf incarnation, the *asura* Bali, and Bali’s exile to *pātāla*, have all been fully retained, with only some Buddhist adaptations having been made; it can also be regarded as a Buddhist retelling of this myth. In the Sanskrit text of this scripture, the place where Bali is imprisoned is recorded as “*pātāla*” (Vaidya 1961, p. 275). This is consistent with all other versions and can be said to be an important element in the mythic story of the *asura* Bali. In his monograph on the mythic story of the *asura* Bali, *The Righteous Demon: A Study of Bali, According to Clifford Hospital*:

The tradition of the binding of Bali is very old, as the literary evidence from Patañjali makes clear. The tradition that Bali is sent to the netherworld (*pātāla*) is invariably present (Hospital 1984, p. 118)

Therefore, this passage represents Buddhism’s explicit confrontation, absorption, and transformation of the Indian myth in which Bali is expelled to *pātāla*. From two aspects of this passage, one can discern the Buddhist attitude toward the subterranean world *pātāla*. First, from the original text of the scripture, it is mentioned that Avalokiteśvara first enters the golden ground and the silver ground to teach the *Dharma* to sentient beings and humans. After emerging from the silver ground, Avalokiteśvara then enters the iron ground (*ayomayyāṃ bhūmyāṃ*) to teach the *Dharma* to the *asura* king Bali and his retinue, that is, he enters *pātāla* to teach the *Dharma*. It also specifically emphasizes that most of his retinue are hunchbacked and ugly. Afterward, the *Bodhisattva* enters a place called darkness (*tamo’ndhakāra*) to teach the *Dharma* to thousands of *yakṣa* and *rākṣasa* (Vaidya 1961, pp. 270–78). From the above elements—“multiple locations, darkness, *asura*, *yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*,” and so on—it is clear that the places where Avalokiteśvara teaches the *Dharma* have a definite connection with the subterranean world in Indian mythology. However, the scripture does not present these places as the “subterranean world”; it merely narrates one location after another. Secondly, this Buddhist scripture was translated into Chinese during the Song dynasty in China by the Indian translator Tian Xizai (天息災). Therefore, the Chinese vocabulary used in the Chinese translation can also reveal how Indian Buddhists at that time viewed terms such as *pātāla* that clearly carry Hindu theoretical connotations. Among them, *pātāla* was translated as “iron cave” (鐵窟). This is likely related to the worldview of *asura* caves in later Buddhist scriptures. The earlier part of this scripture likewise mentions that the *asuras* dwell in the “*vajra* cave,” but the text only states:

bhagavānāha-asti kulaputra asminn eva jambudvīpe vajrakuṣīrṇāma guhā (Vaidya 1961, p. 269)

This may be translated as:

The Blessed One said: “Good son, within this Jambudvīpa, there is a cave named ‘Vajrakuṣī’ (Vajra Cave).”

Therefore, it does not propose that the Vajrakuṣī, where the *asuras* dwell, is located underground. Thus, whether from the content of the scripture or from the vocabulary

chosen by the translator, it is evident that both the compilers and the Chinese translator appear to have avoided foregrounding the cosmological significance of *pātāla* as an underground world. The passage also redefines *pātāla* as a place of suffering, specifically as the place where Bali is imprisoned. Bali himself claims to have suffered greatly, and most of the *asura* beings there are hunchbacked and ugly, conveying a clear sense of deprecation. It is unlikely that the compilers were unaware of the cosmological worldview associated with *pātāla* at the time of the scripture's composition, because this scripture was roughly composed between the fourth and early fifth centuries CE, and

“In terms of time, the text is located within a culture where the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* had a dominant place in Indian culture, particularly the *Skanda Purāṇa*, probably during the Gupta period of the third to fifth century” (Howladar 2018, p. 3)

The *Skanda Purāṇa* for its part, preserves five versions of the story of the *asura* Bali. There is evidence that the authors of some of these versions were very familiar with the earlier Bali myths and continued to create new material on that basis. The image of Bali and the environment in which he resided gradually became more positive (Hospital 1984, pp. 155–64). Of course, the content of *Purāṇa* literature varies greatly and was composed over a long period, so it is not surprising that new and old material are interwoven. Therefore, although one cannot be certain that the compilers of the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* knew these later versions of the Bali myth, it is reasonable to assume that they had a clear understanding of the cosmological concept of the *pātāla* subterranean world in Indian mythology. This is especially true since Tian Xizai, who produced the Chinese translation, lived in the tenth century, and it is highly unlikely that he was unaware of the concept of *pātāla*.

Therefore, when the preceding discussion of Buddhist cosmology is considered together with passages concerning *pātāla* in texts such as the *Śaṅghabhedavastu* and the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, especially in light of the vocabulary adopted in translation, it becomes clear that when translating the term *pātāla*, the translators did not convey its connotation as an underground world. The fact that different translators chose markedly different vocabulary clearly indicates that *pātāla* did not enter Buddhist cosmology. For readers immersed in traditional Indian culture, the use of *pātāla* in the Sanskrit original would pose no problem of understanding; however, when rendered into Chinese, since traditional Buddhist cosmology contains no *pātāla* or similar cosmological structural unit, it was naturally necessary to suppress or remove its Hindu cosmological connotations when translating *pātāla*. This point is significant because the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* already belongs to the corpus of early esoteric Buddhist texts. Thus, throughout the development of Buddhist scriptures, Buddhism clearly absorbed certain aspects of the *pātāla* underworld concept. Yet it neither fully adopted the concept nor used it to construct its own cosmological theory; in some respects, it even removed its cosmological connotations. It is evident that Buddhism adopted a relatively evasive attitude toward the cosmological view of *pātāla* and other underground worlds. This attitude remained relatively consistent from early Buddhism to the early development of esoteric Buddhism, even though Buddhist literature was inevitably influenced by the *pātāla* complex in certain respects, and the appearance of the famous Bali myth in Buddhist scriptures also shows that the influence of Hinduism on Buddhism gradually deepened.

5. The Ritualization of the Asura Cave and Its Liminal Character

From the discussion above, it is evident that although Buddhist cosmology itself contains no conception of an underground world with a structure as clear and stable as *pātāla*, the dwelling places of the *asuras* and *nāgas* are mostly situated beneath the great ocean or within Mount Sumeru. Nevertheless, conceptions of the underground world continue to

appear in Buddhism. As this influence deepened, it became almost inevitable that Buddhist texts would develop more explicit *pātāla*-related conceptions with certain cosmological implications. This situation is manifested in Buddhist scriptures through another conception of the *asura* dwelling place: the idea that the interior of caves in this world, or caves in this world as entrances, can lead into the living space of the *asuras*.

A similar view is already reflected in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* mentioned above. It is also recorded in two Buddhist-related books from the mid-seventh century in Tang China. For example, in *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions* (大唐西域記) written by the monk Xuanzang (玄奘), it is recorded that during his stay in India, Xuanzang heard the story of the logician Bhāvaviveka, who, in order to obtain longevity so as to await the future Buddhahood of Maitreya, entered the *asura* palace inside a cave by reciting mantra (CBETA 2025.R3, T51, no. 2087, pp. 930c25–931b4). Moreover, in *A Forest of Pearls from the Dharma Garden* (法苑珠林), compiled by the monk Daoshi (道世) slightly later than *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*, in addition to the story of the logician Bhāvaviveka, two stories of *asura* caves are also recorded. One of them relates that in Central India a man encountered an *asura* cave in the mountains and forests. After entering, an *asura* gave him a peach and told him to leave quickly. When he came out, his body began to grow larger, and only his head emerged. In this way he lived for several hundred years and was known as the “Big-Headed Immortal.” Furthermore, the Tang envoy Wang Xuanze (王玄策) visited this Big-Headed Immortal three times, even touching his head with his hand and speaking with him. The author Daoshi states that this was personally told to him by Wang Xuanze (CBETA 2025.R3, T53, no. 2122, p. 310b10–29).

Buddhist esoteric literature frequently presents this conception of the *asura* cave and states that accomplished practitioners can enter it. The relevant content will be discussed in detail below. Such a conception differs markedly from the concepts of the *asura* city and *nāga* palace within the Mount Sumeru cosmology that matured in the *Abhidharma* period as described above. As mentioned earlier, in the Mount Sumeru cosmology the *asuras* and the *nāgas* are considered to live in the great ocean, with some *nāgas* also living between Mount Sumeru and Mount Khadira. Although there is a certain degree of communication through hydrological connections, these locations do not directly overlap with the land inhabited by humans in southern *Jambudvīpa*. Although *Jātaka* stories and related narratives record that humans, led by *yakṣas*, *nāgas*, and other clans, can travel to *nāga* palaces and similar places, they do not mention that mountain caves in the human world serve as entrances. Therefore, the claim that one can directly enter the living space of *asuras*, *nāgas*, and other beings through a particular cave does not conform to the conception of their living spaces within the conventional Mount Sumeru cosmology of Buddhism.

It should be made clear here that, since Buddhist cosmology at this time had not systematically constructed a cosmological unit such as the *pātāla* underground world, the concepts of *asura* cave, *nāga* palace, and underground (*pātāla*) are not integrated into a single spatial system but are basically expressed separately. In reality, however, they all reflect the influence of the *pātāla* underground world, and among them the expression of the *asura* cave is the most frequent, so the *asura* cave is taken as the representative for this study.

The Buddhist conception of the *asura* cave is best understood as a Buddhist reconfiguration of the Hindu *pātāla* complex. This is clearly argued by Mayer, who explicitly states in both the abstract and the main text: “*Asuras’ caves as the entrances to Pātāla*” (Mayer 2007, p. 1). However, Mayer largely presupposes that the *asura* cave in Buddhism functions as an entrance to *pātāla*, and on this premise conducts a comprehensive analysis of the relevant esoteric literature without directly discussing the relationship between the two. After all, *pātāla* is not an explicitly inherent concept in Buddhism. Therefore, I would like to offer some supplementary discussion here regarding the relationship between the *asura* cave in

Buddhist esoteric traditions and *pātāla*. First, from the perspective of textual translation, the important early esoteric text *Mañjuśrīyamūlakalpa* (also known as *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*) may be taken as an example. This scripture underwent a long process of compilation and redaction, and portions of it were translated into Chinese during the Song dynasty by the Indian translator Tian Xizai under the title 大方廣菩薩藏文殊師利根本儀軌經. This text uses the term *pātāla* in multiple places, and these occurrences carry clear cosmological implications. Two of these passages have counterparts in the Chinese translation. We can compare the Sanskrit and Chinese texts to examine their relationship. The first passage is in the twelfth chapter:

adhaḥ śākhāvalambasthā phalā ye tu prakīrtitā /
 gacched rasātalaṃ taistu dānavānāṃ ca yoṣitām /
 taiḥ phalaiḥ akṣasūtram tu grhītā samprakīrtitā //
 adho yā yām tu nilayāḥ pātālaṃ tena taṃ vrajet /
 praviśya tatra vai divyaṃ saukhyamāsādyā jāpinaḥ /
 āsurībhiḥ samāsakto tiṣṭhet kalpaṃ vasecca sau // (Sastri 1920, pp. 119–20)

Its corresponding Chinese translation reads as follows:

若得下枝長而下指，乃至入地，彼枝有子得為珠者，彼持課人當依儀軌專注受持，念誦者凡是地中山間所有空窟有修羅住處，是持課人皆悉能入，與修羅男女同住於修羅宮中，經於一劫受最上快樂。(CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1191, p. 873b27–c2)

This may be translated as:

“If one obtains a lower branch that is long and points downward, even reaching into the earth, which bears seeds fit for making sacred beads, then the practitioner who upholds the ritual should, in accordance with the ritual procedure, concentrate and maintain it. The reciter, wherever there are hollow caves in the mountains and beneath the earth that are abodes of *asuras*, will be able to enter all of them. Together with *asura* males and females, he will dwell in the *asura* palace and enjoy the supreme bliss for one *kalpa*.”

When these two linguistic versions are compared, the chapter location of the passage and its main meaning are basically the same. Among them, two important terms stand out: one is the noun *rasātala*, which clearly carries the cosmological connotation of the underground world and is translated as “地” (earth). The other is *pātāla*. Regarding the translation of this term, when compared with the Sanskrit text, the passage *adho yā yām tu nilayāḥ pātāla* corresponds to the Chinese text’s “地中山間所有空窟有修羅住處” (All hollow caverns in the mountains and beneath the earth that are abodes of the *Asuras*). Here the translator provides an explanatory and somewhat expanded rendering, wishing to convey some of the cosmological connotations inherent in *pātāla*, and thus renders it as “empty caves in the mountains and within the earth where *asuras* dwell.” Not only does the Sanskrit text use the term *pātāla*, but the Chinese translator has also expanded the explanation by employing terms such as *asura* and cave. This provides strong textual evidence that the esoteric Buddhist “*asura* cave” was understood, at least in this translation context, through the semantic field of *pātāla*. Another piece of evidence appears in the fourth chapter with the following passage:

avaśānāṃ ca vaśamānetā pāparaudrapracāriṇām
 khacare bhūcare vāpi pātāle cāpi samantataḥ (Sastri 1920, p. 66)

Its corresponding Chinese translation reads as follows:

復有毀謗真言輕慢三寶，及造一切罪業，或在空居、或住地上、或居地下，並令調伏隨順修學。(CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1191, p. 862a9–11)

This may be translated as:

Moreover, those who slander the mantras, slight and disrespect the Three Treasures, and commit all manner of karmic offenses—whether dwelling in the void realms, upon the earth, or beneath the earth—shall all be subdued and caused to comply, follow, and practice the Dharma.

The Chinese rendering here shows some contextual reorganization and doctrinal expansion. However, the phrase *khacare bhūcare vāpi pātāle* clearly corresponds to the three segments “或在空居、或住地上、或居地下 (whether dwelling in the void realms, upon the earth, or beneath the earth)” in which *pātāla* is translated as “地下 (beneath the earth)”, corresponding to its cosmological position without further expansion. The situation of directly translating *pātāla* as “地下 (beneath the earth)” can be compared and analyzed with another scripture titled *The Vajragarbharatnarājantra* (最上乘金剛大教寶王經). This scripture now survives only in its Chinese translation, in which there is the following sentence:

爾時金剛手菩薩摩訶薩為彼諸王及一切學眾演說金剛大乘一切諸法……又復演說入地入修羅窟成就之法。(CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1128, p. 546a28–b3)

This may be translated as:

At that time, Vajrapāṇi *Bodhisattva Mahāsattva* expounded all the *dharma*s of the *Vajra Mahāyāna* for those kings and all the assembly of practitioners... Furthermore, he taught the method of attainment for entering the earth and entering the *asura* caverns.

This scripture refers to a method of attainment as “entering the earth” and places it in parallel with “entering the *asura* cave,” indicating that the two are closely related accomplishment methods. The translation context is also relevant here: Fatian (法天), the translator of this scripture, collaborated with Tian Xizai, the translator of the *Dafang Guang Pu Sa Zang Wen Shu Shi Li Ben Yi Gui Jing*, on the translation of many works. The two worked together in the same translation bureau for as long as eighteen years. According to the *Dazhong Xiangfu Fabao Lu* (大中祥符法寶錄), the *Vajragarbharatnarājantra* (最上乘金剛大教寶王經) was translated in the first month of the Chunhua (淳化) fifth year, that is, 995 CE: “Tripiṭaka Śramaṇa Fatian, Sanskrit meaning verified by Faxian (法賢), Sanskrit text certified by Shihu (施護).” (CBETA 2025.R3, A111, no. 1493, p. 782b10–11).⁷ Faxian, that is, Tian Xizai, was a full participant and was responsible for verifying the Sanskrit meaning. Therefore, if we combine the fact that Tian Xizai rendered *pātāla* and *rasātala* with terms related to “earth” (地) with the fact that the chapter twelve passage expands this into the abode of *asuras*, there is reason to believe that the “accomplishment method of entering the earth and entering the *asura* cave” here is based on the cosmological concept of the *pātāla* underground world. Thus, expressions such as “entering the *asura* cave” and “entering the earth” in Buddhist esoteric texts are indeed manifestations of the cosmological concept of the *pātāla* underground world in Buddhism.

From the rituals for entering the *asura* cave in Buddhist sources, it can further be seen that these practices presuppose a certain cosmological background. For example, the *Kaṇikrodhavajrakumārabodhisattvasādhanaavidhi* states:

修此法者，當於有舍利塔前，或於河岸清流水側，或於空閑及以天廟或於山間，於如是處，或時飲乳食菜或復乞食，專誦真言滿六十萬遍，即先行法皆得成就……又若欲往阿修羅宮受妙樂者，當往阿修羅窟門。(CBETA 2025.R3, T21, no. 1222a, p. 102b10–27)

This may be translated as:

The practitioner of this method should, in front of a stūpa containing relics, or by the clear flowing water on a riverbank, or in a secluded place, or in a heavenly temple, or in the mountains—in such places—sometimes drink milk and eat vegetables or beg for food, and recite the mantra exclusively until it reaches six hundred thousand repetitions; then all the preliminary practices will be accomplished... Furthermore, if one wishes to go to the *asura* palace to enjoy supreme bliss, one should go to the gate of the *asura* cave.

That is to say, the ritual for going to the *asura* palace cannot be performed anywhere; it requires a specific geographical location. The practitioner must first choose a location, complete the recitation of mantra until accomplishment, and only then proceed to the cave gate to perform the ritual. Such a notion is recorded in most Buddhist esoteric scriptures that document the ritual of entering the *asura* cave, albeit briefly. For example, the *Amoghapaśākalparāja Sūtra* (不空罽索神變真言經) also states:

若入修羅窟者，住阿修羅窟門。(CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1092, p. 251b5–6)

This may be translated as:

If one wishes to enter the *asura* cave, one should stay at the gate of the *asura* cave.

This is very similar to the ritual procedure for entering *pātāla* in Hindu tantric materials. For example, the *Jayadrathayāmala* mentions:

pātālasādhane yojyā devadevī kṛśodarī
japtvā lakṣatrayaṃ mantrī parvatāgre daśāmsataḥ
juhuyān mīnacchāgontham [tva] ktaṃ tatsuradāruṇam
paścād gacched biladvāraṃ tatra sādhanam ārabhet (Serbaeva 2023, p. 44)

This may be translated as:

In the practice for *pātāla* one should employ the slender-waisted goddess, the queen of the gods. Having recited the mantra three hundred thousand times on the mountain peak, the mantrin should offer one tenth [of that number] as oblations, burning fish, goat, and *suradāru* wood. Afterward, one should proceed to the entrance of the cave and there begin the *sādhana*.

On the basis of the similarity between the ritual procedures, it can also be argued that concepts such as the *asura* cave, *nāga* palace, and underground realms in Buddhist esoteric literature largely derive from the cosmological view of the *pātāla* underground world and represent the direct influence of that cosmological view on Buddhism. Since it can be clearly established that concepts such as the *asura* cave originate from the influence of the *pātāla* underground world cosmology, it is now possible to proceed with an analysis of the process of this influence. First, as discussed above, both Hinduism and Buddhism share the two dimensions of mythic and empirical aspects in their conceptions of beings such as the *asuras* and the *nāgas* and their dwelling places, and both traditions recognize that these beings live in abundance and that their abodes are magnificent and splendid. Therefore, when the cosmological view of the *pātāla* underground world influenced Buddhism, these conceptions that Buddhism already upheld were naturally transferred to the related concepts of the *asura* cave. Since both traditions also recognize that these places can connect with the present world, it is not surprising that *asura* caves such as the one at Pharping should appear. These are concrete manifestations of the traditional combination of the mythic and empirical dimensions of such sites. However, when one proceeds to analyze the influence at the theoretical level, a major difference emerges between the *asura* cave in Buddhism and *pātāla*: in the theory of early Buddhist esoteric traditions, although the concept of *pātāla* was introduced, a systematic construction at the cosmological level

was still not carried out. In other words, the *asura* cave and the world within the cave did not constitute a stable and independent cosmological unit within Buddhist cosmological theory. Therefore, in terms of its location, the *asura* cave remains within this real world, except that the interior of the cave offers certain benefits different from those outside the cave.

When the relevant rituals are analyzed, this difference becomes even clearer. Here I take Arnold van Gennep's three-stage model of rites of passage—separation, liminality, and incorporation—as the analytical framework (Van Gennep 1960, 11). It should first be made clear that the relevant cultivation rituals are obviously centered on the practitioner's unique religious experience, so their social significance will not be discussed. The three stages of the rite of passage are separation, liminality, and integration. For the first stage, the rituals, as stated in the quotations above, require the practitioner to go to certain special locations and to recite mantra a specific number of times. This requirement constitutes a ritual separation. In the esoteric context, it corresponds to the *puraścaraṇa* stage, that is, a set of preliminary practices performed to make the mantra efficacious and to attain *siddhi*. I believe that this ritual separation can be interpreted from three aspects: space, body, and preliminary accomplishment. From the spatial aspect, the ritual cannot be performed in just any location. As in the *Kaṇikrodhavajrakumārabodhisattvasādhanaṭṭhi* quoted above, one must choose places that meet specific criteria. From the bodily aspect, the practitioner cannot perform the practice in an ordinary bodily state; there are specific requirements for both the internal and external aspects of the body. For example, the *Wufoding sanmei tuoluoni jing* (五佛頂三昧陀羅尼經) states:

持以諸藥、種種果子，喫為齋食，勿飲食，誦頂王呪三七遍，乃當持以屍陀林鐵鑄為輪，輻相具足。其作輪匠六根端正，教鑄冶已，將一善伴詣阿修羅窟。(CBETA 2025.R3, T19, no. 952, p. 281c17–20)

This may be translated as:

Holding various medicinal herbs and all manner of fruits, one shall take them as fasting meal; partake of no other food or drink. Recite the Uṣṇīṣarāja Dhāraṇī twenty-one times. Then take an iron wheel forged in the charnel ground, perfectly complete with all its spokes. The craftsman who makes the wheel must be upright in his six sense faculties. After instructing him in the casting and forging, bring along a virtuous companion and proceed to the *asura* cavern.

There are clearly corresponding requirements for both internal diet and external implements, and, as in the quotations above, the recitation of mantra must reach a certain number. All these constitute constraints and transformations at the bodily level, enabling the practitioner to achieve separation from the ordinary state at the ritual level. This separation is not merely operational; it also requires the actual attainment of certain accomplishments, namely the third point: preliminary accomplishment. This requirement in fact clearly indicates that the practitioner is no longer an ordinary practitioner. Although a new identity and order have not yet been achieved, the practitioner is successfully shaped into a ritual subject who “can approach other realms, can mobilize the power of the mantra, and can bear the accomplishment.” Furthermore, the attainment of this preliminary transformation has clear standards. Although some Chinese translations mention this, the description is not sufficiently detailed, whereas the Tibetan translation specifically dedicated to entering *pātāla*, the *Āryavajrapātālanāmatantrarāja* (*Phags pa rdo rje sa'og gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*), is very detailed and likewise provides a series of requirements before actually entering *pātāla*:

གྱི་སྒྲོར་འཇུག་པར་འདོད་པར་གར་ན།
དེས་རྩོུ་སྒྲོ་བོའི་བསྐྱེན་པ་སྒྲོན་དྲུག་ལ་ཕྱིས་འཇུག་པར་བྱའོ།
སེམས་ཅན་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་བྱམས་པའི་སེམས་དང་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་མཚན་པ་ལ་དགའ་བས་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་།
དེ་ལ་སྒྲོན་དྲུག་སྐྱེན་པ་ནི་འབྲམ་ཕྱག་བརྒྱད་སྒྲོང་མོ་ཟེའི་སྒྲུབ་བཅཅད་ལ།

པར་འབྲུང་བའི་སྤྱིང་པོའི་མཚན་རྟེན་བྱས་ལ། དེའི་མདུན་དུ་འོ་མའམ་རྩ་བོ་འདུས་པ་འམ། ཤིང་གཅིག་པ་འམ། བ་ལང་གི་ལྷ་ས་མ། བས་མཐའ་འམ།
མཚན་རྟེན་གང་ཡང་རྩང་བའི་གནས་སུ་བྱང་རྩལ་གྱི་སེམས་རྩེས་སུ་དྲན་པས་དེ་བཞིན་གཤེགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་གསོལ་བ་བཏབ་

ནས་སྤྲིག་པ་བཤགས་ཏེ། ལྷ་ན་མེད་པར་བསྐྱོས་ལ་དམ་པའི་ཆོས་བཏོན་ཏེ་རྩེས་སུ་དྲན་པར་བྱས་ལ།
མཚན་རྟེན་གྱི་ལས་ལ་རྩེས་སུ་གནས་ནས་ལུས་དང་སྟོག་ལ་དགའ་བ་དོར་ཏེ། དུས་གསུམ་དུ་བྱག་རྒྱ་དང་། དབང་བསྐྱར་ཞིང་དུས་གསུམ་དུ་ཁྲུས་བྱས་ལ།
དེ་ལྟ་བུའི་ཚུལ་གྱིས་

བསྟན་པ་བྱའོ། །གང་དག་རྫི་ལམ་མམ། མངོན་སུམ་མཚན་མ་མཐོང་ན་རེ་ཤིག་མི་འཇུག་སྟེ། དེ་ཡང་རྫི་ལམ་ནི་གྲང་པོ་ཆེན་པོས་ཟེལ་གྱིས་མནན་པ་འམ། གཟིར་བའམ།
བྲོས་པ་འམ། འགྱུ་ལ་བའམ། གང་དག་ཤི་བ་དེ་ལྟ་བུ་མཐོང་ན་དེ་ནས་འཇུག་པར་བྱའོ། །ཡང་ན་མངོན་

སུམ་སྟེ་སྟོ་ལམ་གྱི་མཚན་མ་བཅོམ་པ་འམ། རྫོ་ཆེན་པོ་ལྟ་བུ་བའམ། ཁྲོས་ནས་གཟའ་ཆེན་པོ་འགྲགས་པ་འམ། གདུག་པ་རྣམས་དང་། གཏུམ་པོ་དང་། འཛིགས་བྱེད་དང་། ཀྲ་དང་།
གྲང་པོ་ཆེན་པོ་དང་། སེང་གེ་དང་། སྟག་དང་། མ་ཏེ་དང་། དགའི་དབུས་སུ་བྱིན་ཡང་

བལྟ་དཀའ་བར་འགྱུར་བ་དང་། དེ་དག་ཐམས་ཅད་བྱམས་པའི་སེམས་སུ་གྱུར་ན་དེ་ནས་འཇུག་པར་བྱའོ། །ལྷ་ཐམས་ཅད་མངག་གཞུག་ཏུ་འགྱུར་ཅོ། (Ārya Va-
jrapātāla Nāma Tantra Rāja n.d., D 744, rgyud 'bum, tsha, fol. 241b1–241b6)

This may be translated as:

If one wishes to enter this gateway, one must first complete the preliminary rite of the *Vajra Wrathful Deity*. This entails eight hundred thousand recitations while living on alms and maintaining silence. With loving-kindness toward all sentient beings and delight in offering to the Tathāgatas, one should construct a *stūpa* containing the essence of dependent origination. Before it, in a mountain setting, at a confluence of rivers, beneath a solitary tree, in a cow pen, in a remote place, or at any suitable *stūpa*-site, one should arouse *bodhicitta*, supplicate all the *Tathāgatas*, confess one's misdeeds, dedicate the merit to unsurpassed awakening, recite the holy *Dharma*, and remain in recollection. One must abandon attachment to body and life, perform *mudrās* and consecrations three times each day, and bathe three times each day. Until signs arise, whether in dreams or in direct perception, one should refrain from entering. Dream-signs include being crushed by a great elephant, fleeing, falling, or seeing the dead. Direct signs include a broken door fastening, the fall of a great rock, the wrathful summoning of a great astral power, or encounters with poisonous, violent, or terrifying beings, *nāgas*, elephants, lions, tigers, buffaloes, or even enemies, without being easily perceived. Once all these are transformed into loving-kindness, one may enter; thereupon all the gods become one's servants.

In this scripture, not only are the selection of the location and the operations the practitioner should perform on the body described, but standards for preliminary accomplishment are also provided through dreams. These standards are not purely external signs; they also require the practitioner to generate a mind of loving-kindness when dreaming of these states, which constitutes a standard for the internal mental state. After all these internal and external requirements have been fully fulfilled, in reality, the practitioner, through changing locations, purifying the body, and mantra empowerment, gradually separates from the order of daily life and enters an achievement-oriented ritual state.

Thereupon the practitioner, having accomplished the ritual, will enter the *asura* cave. The positioning of the practitioner's state inside the *asura* cave can be viewed from two aspects. On the one hand is the practitioner's own state: at this moment the practitioner does not enter another environment in the sense of rebirth within *samsāra*; he or she remains in the present life and present body. On the other hand is the theoretical location of the *asura* cave. As discussed above, traditional Buddhist cosmology possesses only a limited conception of an underground world, and in systematic discussions these conceptions are basically assigned to the hells and the *preta* realm, serving the idea of karmic rebirth. Therefore, according to Buddhist theory, the *asura* cave that can be entered in the mountains of *Jambudvīpa* should still lie within this very *Jambudvīpa*. Yet it is not an ordinary

place that remains continuously open in the everyday world; rather, it is a heterogeneous space that can be opened only through the ritual conditions of mantra, *mudrā*, offerings, and *homa*. It is neither equivalent to an ordinary geographical cave nor a stably placed underground level within Buddhist cosmology; instead, it is a mediating field situated between the mundane world and the realm of the marvelous, between manifestation and concealment. Nevertheless, the interior of the cave differs markedly from the exterior—not only in its inhabitants and construction, but also because, from the moment the cave gate opens, the process is one of unique danger and benefit existing side by side. For example, the *Amoghapāśakalparāja Sūtra* states:

至宮路中，忽見化出清淨無垢藥精味神，狀如天形，眾寶衣服備莊嚴身，手便執持俱延枝果。無垢藥精有大毒威，一踰膳那觀目人者，力能吸奪人精氣。(CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1092, p. 251b12–15)

This may be translated as:

Upon the path leading to the palace, there suddenly manifests a divine spirit of pure, immaculate medicinal essence, imbued with sublime flavour. It appears in a heavenly form, adorned with garments of manifold precious jewels decorating its body, and holds in its hand the branch and fruit of the *Kutala* tree. This immaculate medicinal essence possesses great toxic power. It is able to draw away and seize the vital essence and spirit of anyone who catches sight of it within a distance of one *yojana*.

The practitioner, facing such a situation, must recite the corresponding mantra in order to proceed safely. In the *Āryavajrapātālanāmatantrarāja* (*Phags pa rdo rje sa'og gi rgyud kyi rgyal po*), the risks and benefits of entering the cave are described in considerable detail: seeing different scenes or hearing different sounds means that different good or bad things will occur. For example:

དག་བྱ་གཉིས་ལ་ནི། ཁྲ་པོ་ཡང་དག་རྟེན་མཐོང་ནས། མཐོང་ནས་མ་མཐོང་གུར་ན་ནི། བྱ་གཉིས་ནི་ལས་ཀྱང་བྱེད། ཁྲ་དག་བྱ་གཉིས་ལ་ལེ།
ཁྲོས་ལུའི་དབང་ལྷན་རྒྱུ་མཐོང་ན། དཔལ་ལོས་དེར་ནི་འཇུག་མི་བྱ། (Ārya Vajrapātāla Nāma Tantra Rāja n.d., D 744, rgyud 'bum, tsha, fol. 242a6–7)

This may be translated as:

At the entrance to that opening, if one sees an elephant as a genuine sign and, once seen, it then disappears from view, that opening is fit for the accomplishment of all rites. If, however, at the moment of entering that opening one clearly perceives the lord of the creeping beings, the adept should not enter it.

Moreover, the practitioner must be able to clearly discern these risks and benefits and pass the tests before being able to enter. Therefore, the process of actually entering the *asura* cave is accompanied by various uncertainties. This corresponds to van Gennep's description of the uncertainty and riskiness of the liminal stage (Van Gennep 1960, pp. viii–ix), although its presentation possesses a certain supernatural character. Moreover, for the practitioner the *asura* cave is by no means merely a place where treasures can be obtained; it also brings about certain special transformations for the practitioner himself. For example, the *Amoghapāśakalparāja Sūtra* records that after the practitioner enters the cave and consumes the ambrosia within it, his body will turn golden and he will obtain a lifespan of one thousand kalpas (CBETA 2025.R3, T20, no. 1092, p. 251c24–27). Moreover, the *Wufoding sanmei tuoluoni jing* explicitly states that even after emerging from the cave, these special transformations will not disappear; the practitioner will still obtain a long lifespan of one great kalpa. (CBETA 2025.R3, T19, no. 952, p. 282a1–2). There are also numerous descriptions of other benefits, such as various precious treasures, divine medicines, and the ability to command *asuras* and other beings.

However, it must be made clear that although entering the *asura* cave is by no means easy and requires a complete set of rituals, and although one can obtain many excellent transformations, wealth, and status by entering it, Buddhism explicitly opposes remaining there for a long time. This is mentioned in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*, and its commentary provides a clear explanation:

云何窟心？謂順修為入窟法”者，謂諸龍、阿修羅等，皆在地下或海底深窟中。多有神仙諸藥，能得長壽自在。行者或念彼中多有美女，端正同於諸天，可無夭逝之憂，五欲自恣。或念留住彼中，可得劫壽見未來諸佛。皆是窟心也。當念如法修行，可於此生見法明道乃至成佛，不應枉路稽留念此世仙之法，是彼對治。

(CBETA 2025.R3, T39, no. 1796, p. 599a9–16)

This may be translated as:

What is meant by the cave-mind?

The statement “following the practice constitutes the method of entering the cave” means that all *nāgas* and *asuras* dwell in deep caverns beneath the earth or at the bottom of the sea. Abounding therein are immortals and all manner of medicinal herbs, which can grant longevity and unimpeded freedom. The practitioner may dwell in thought upon the many beautiful women dwelling there, whose perfect form equals that of celestial beings; free from the anxiety of untimely death, they indulge freely in the five desires. One may also contemplate abiding there to gain the lifespan of a *kalpa* and behold the buddhas of the future. All such thoughts are termed the cave mind. One ought to practise in accordance with the *dharma*, so that in this very life one may perceive the Truth, attain enlightenment, and even realise Buddhahood. One should not wander astray and linger in attachment to the worldly ways of immortals; this is the antidote to such [mental states].

This commentary clearly explains what is meant by the “cave-mind (窟心)” mentioned in the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*; it is precisely the concept of *pātāla* that has been discussed throughout this article. It also provides the reason why one should not remain in the cave for long: according to Buddhist doctrine, craving longevity and wealth instead of pursuing Buddhahood is erroneous; one should strive to attain Buddhahood. Therefore, for Buddhist practitioners, entering the cave is by no means the final goal. After obtaining various benefits and transformations inside the cave, one must treat these benefits and transformations as the foundation for continuing the path of practice. Thus, entering the cave is not only not something to be greedily sought, but something that should be promptly relinquished. Even if one truly succeeds in entering the cave and obtaining great benefits, one should promptly exit the cave and continue practicing in order to attain Buddhahood. This way of thinking not only embodies the pursuit of the ultimate goal of Buddhahood in Buddhist doctrine, but also reveals the perspective from which Buddhism accepts heterogeneous cultural elements such as the *asura* cave and *nāga* palace—namely, that on the path toward Buddhahood one can and should accumulate the two accumulations, not only the accumulation of wisdom but also the accumulation of merit. In early Buddhism the wealth that a practitioner should possess was mostly presented in abstract theoretical terms rather than as concrete external possessions. For example, in AN VII.6, the seven kinds of wealth that the Buddha said a monk should possess to support practice are not external provisions but the internal virtues of faith, moral discipline, a sense of shame, a sense of dread, learning, generosity, and wisdom. Moreover, in Mahāyāna scriptures there is a clear turn toward the dual accumulation of wisdom and merit. For example, the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (十地經) states:

mahāpunyajñānasambhārapathyadanasaṃruddhayā
mahāntaṃ sattvasārthaṃ yathāparipācitaṃ saṃsārāṭavikāntāradurgādatikramya
yāvatsarvajñatāmahānagaramanuprāpayati (Dharmamitra 2019, p. 313)

This may be translated as:

By means of the path blocked and enclosed by the great accumulation of merit and wisdom, having fully matured the supreme essential purpose of all beings, and transcended the perilous wilderness and difficult passes of *saṃsāra*, one shall proceed all the way to the great city of Omniscience.

From the scripture it is evident that the Mahāyāna *Bodhisattva* must use the dual accumulations of great wisdom and great merit to guide and edify sentient beings. In the Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (大乘莊嚴經論), the abundance of wisdom and merit is even regarded as one of the distinctions between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna (Bagchi 1970, p. 4).⁸ It is evident that for Mahāyāna practitioners, the accumulation of merit is an important foundation for practice and is of equal importance to the enhancement of wisdom. Therefore, the absorption of concepts and rituals such as the *asura* cave for the rapid accumulation of merit has both a theoretical basis and necessity. This is not a matter of purely theoretical inference. In the *Subāhuparipṛcchā* (蘇婆呼童子請問經), an important text of early esoteric Buddhism, there is a passage concerning entry into the *asura* palace:

復次，蘇婆呼童子！有諸菩薩、金剛及天、龍、藥叉、修羅等，對於佛前及緣覺聲聞眾中，各自說真言，世尊為我證明。如來為利益諸有情故，皆悉證許，復慈加被。我今說真言，皆有三品：

成上品者，謂昇空而去，入修羅宮，自在變形，作藥叉女夫主者，長年成幻化法，自變己身為密跡等。

成中品者，獲得賤財乃至自在富貴，舉意從心。

下品者令人相憎，及能攝來，從國令去，乃至令枯。

下中下者，為療鬼魅龍鬼嬰兒，令人惛沈多睡，……如是等類皆是外法，不可依行。(CBETA 2025.R3, T18, no. 895a, p. 733b14–c8)

This may be translated as:

“Furthermore, Subāhu! There are *bodhisattvas*, *vajra beings*, *devas*, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *asuras*, and others who, before the Buddha and in the assemblies of *pratyekabuddhas* and *śrāvakas*, each proclaimed their own mantras, with the Blessed One serving as witness for them. For the benefit of sentient beings, the Tathāgata approved them all and compassionately empowered them. I shall now explain that these mantras have three grades.

“Those that accomplish the superior grade enable one to ascend into the air and depart, enter the *asura* palace, freely transform one’s form, become the lord or husband of *yakṣiṇīs*, attain longevity, accomplish methods of magical transformation, or transform one’s own body into that of Vajrapāṇi and the like.

“Those that accomplish the middle grade enable one to obtain inferior forms of wealth and, further, freedom, riches, and noble status, so that whatever one intends is fulfilled according to one’s wish.

“Those of the lower grade cause people to hate one another, enable one to summon others, expel people from a country, or even cause them to wither away.

“As for the lower and still lower kinds, they are used for treating afflictions caused by ghosts, spirits, *nāgas*, and demonic influences in children, or for making people dull, confused, and excessively sleepy... Practices of this kind are all external practices and should not be relied upon or performed.”

This passage shows that, although the text does not specify exactly which mantras are being discussed, these mantras are clearly directed toward the acquisition of worldly benefits. Among them, “entering the *asura* palace” and its related accomplishments are classified as “superior accomplishments,” whereas the lowest forms of accomplishment include practices that harm others and are therefore explicitly identified as practices that should not be undertaken. The basic function of these mantras, then, is the acquisition of worldly benefits, prosperity, powers, and related forms of accomplishment. Nevertheless, the Tathāgata still approves them, and the stated reason is that they are authorized “for the benefit of sentient beings.” This indicates that the primary aim of entering the *asura* cave or palace is to obtain wealth, benefits, capacities, and related accomplishments. Although such aims are not the ultimate goal pursued by Buddhist doctrine, they are nevertheless permitted to a certain degree insofar as they can be oriented toward the benefit of sentient beings. Moreover, from this doctrinal perspective, exiting the *asura* cave after entering it constitutes the third stage of “reintegration” in the rite of passage. Entering the *asura* cave is by no means the final goal; rather, it represents a transitional stage in the accumulation of merit. After exiting the cave, the practitioner enters a new state in which lifespan, wealth, and status have all been greatly enhanced, and then returns to the path of Buddhist practice so as to attain Buddhahood more swiftly. From this it can be seen that in Buddhist esoteric traditions the *pātāla*-related concepts and rituals represented by the *asura* cave occupy, from a cosmological perspective, a unique position that is both within this world and beyond it, and from the perspective of ritual practice and its underlying theoretical framework, constitute for the individual practitioner a distinctive rite of passage marked by rich religious experience and cultural otherness, serving the Buddhist path of practice.

The preceding discussion also allows Robert Mayer’s observation concerning the marginalization of *asura*-cave practices in later *Vajrayāna* to be further refined (Mayer 2007, p. 13). Within the Buddhist theoretical framework, this practice possessed obvious heterogeneity, uncertainty, and replaceability. Just as Robert Mayer has pointed out, traditional Buddhist theory contains no clear cosmology of the *asura* cave or *pātāla*, and it retained a visibly exogenous character within the Buddhist cosmological framework. The materials cited above also show that entering the *asura* cave involves obvious uncertainty. This uncertainty is reflected in the various favorable or unfavorable situations that occur after the cave gate is opened, and is also reflected in the fact that the accomplishment of opening the cave gate depends almost entirely on the practitioner’s own level of attainment and is therefore highly subjective. Furthermore, within Buddhist practice theory, it serves merely to accumulate merit and can be replaced by other doctrinally consistent methods of merit accumulation. Therefore, in the later development of Buddhist esoteric traditions, especially after these traditions entered regions such as Tibet and China, which were no longer embedded in the traditional Indian cultural background, given that Buddhism had not incorporated *pātāla* into its own cosmology, the gradual marginalization of these practices becomes understandable.

However, it should be pointed out that the above discussion is premised on the assumption that the mature Mount Sumeru cosmology of the *Abhidharma* period of Buddhism did not undergo major reconstruction; that is, the *pātāla* underground world did not enter Buddhist cosmology as a stable cosmological unit. This premise changed in the subsequent development of Buddhist theory. The *Kālacakra Tantra* reconfigures Buddhist cosmology. The following passage appears in this context:

vāyvantān merusīmno narakaphaṇipuram yojanāmām dvilakṣaṃ (Banerjee 1985, p. 3)

This may be translated as:

From the boundary of Meru to the hells and Phaṇipura is a distance of two hundred thousand *yojanas*.

Although the term *pātāla* is not used here, it mentions that beneath the earth there is *phaṇipura*, that is, the serpent city. Its important commentary, the *Vimalaprabhā*, interprets this as follows:

tasmād vāyvantān meruṃ yāvat sapta narakāṇi, aṣṭamaṃ phaṇipuram iti.....tadeva mānaṃ dvidhā—ardhaṃ asurabhavanam, ardhaṃ nāgabhavanam iti. evaṃ śarīre pādātāt kaṭi yāvat.....yathākramena narakaphaṇipurāṇi veditavyāni. (Upadhyaya 1986, p. 67)

This may be translated as:

Therefore, from the windy realms up to Meru lie the seven hells, and the eighth is the serpent city.....That very extent is divided into two halves: one half is the abode of the *asuras*, and the other half is the abode of the *nāgas*. Likewise, within the body, from the sole of the foot up to the waist.....the hells and serpent cities are to be understood in due order.

From this explanation, it can be clearly seen that the term *phaṇipura* used in the original text of the *Kālacakra Tantra* refers to the *pātāla* underground world. Moreover, in the subsequent passage the *Vimalaprabhā* explicitly uses the term *pātāla* in the cosmological sense:

tribhuvanasakalaṃ svargamartyapātālabhuvanaṃ, tribhuvana-sakalaṃ kālayogāt prajātaṃ (Upadhyaya 1986, p. 68)

This may be translated as:

All the three worlds—the realms of heaven, mortal humans, and the nether *pātāla*—the entirety of the triple universe has arisen from the conjunction of time.

From the above passages, it can be seen that in the theoretical system of the *Kālacakra*, *pātāla* has become an independent cosmological unit. However, this cosmology in the *Kālacakra* also places the hells within *pātāla*, which differs from the traditional Hindu conception and is more similar to the Jain view of the hells and *pātāla* (Newman 1987, p. 478). Regardless of its origin, this cosmological reconfiguration significantly influenced conceptions of practice. The correspondence between the body and cosmological levels mentioned in the commentary of the *Vimalaprabhā* is one example of applying this cosmology to practice. Nevertheless, due to the adjustment in cosmology, the development of theory and practice follows a different trajectory, which falls outside the scope of this article. This nevertheless shows that the influence of *pātāla* as a cosmological conception on Buddhist theory continued to intensify.

6. Conclusions

The central conclusion of this article is that Buddhism selectively restructured the seven-layered *pātāla* of the Hindu tradition and its related subterranean, *nāga*, and *asura* spaces. Within mainstream Buddhist cosmology and in early esoteric Buddhist sources, Buddhism did not establish an independent lower-world structure corresponding to *pātāla*. Yet at the levels of narrative, relic preservation, scriptural transmission, Dharma protection, and esoteric ritual practice, *nāgaloka*, *asura* palaces, and later *asura* caves continued to develop and came to perform important religious functions. The *asura* cave in esoteric Buddhist literature therefore cannot be understood simply as a direct transplantation of *pātāla*. It was certainly influenced by the conception of the *pātāla* underworld, but this influence was not imposed upon an empty Buddhist system. Before the emergence of esoteric Buddhism, Buddhism already possessed rich narratives concerning *nāgaloka*, *nāgas'* possession

of treasures, the protection of relics, the preservation of scriptures, and human entry into non-human spaces. Although these narratives did not constitute a stable subterranean cosmological unit, they provided internal resources for esoteric Buddhism's transformation of spaces such as the *asura* cave and the *nāga* palace into fields of practice.

In this respect, the *asura* cave in esoteric Buddhism should not be described simply as the buddhistization of the Hindu *pātāla*. Rather, it is the product of an interaction between the broader Indian religious imagination of subterranean and non-human spaces and Buddhism's own narratives concerning the retrieval of treasures from *nāgaloka*, the preservation of sacred objects, and the transmission of scriptures. What Buddhism absorbed was not a single cosmological location, but a composite religious imagination organized around the underground, caves, bodies of water, non-human beings, wealth, longevity, supernatural powers, and sacred objects. Within the broader context of Indian tantric ritual practice, esoteric Buddhism further ritualized this imagination, transforming it from a mythic otherworldly space into a field of practice that could be opened and entered through mantra, *mudrā*, recitation, preliminary practice, and signs of accomplishment. This transformation also reveals an important mechanism by which Buddhism dealt with this transreligious spatial conception. It did not absorb external elements directly through theoretical reconstruction. Instead, it stripped away their original cosmological hierarchy, retained their narrative potential, spatial symbolism, and practical functions, combined them with its own traditions, and relocated them within its own structure of practice. The *asura* cave thus became a liminal field: it is connected with real caves, bodies of water, sacred sites, and geographical entrances, while also leading to non-human worlds such as those of *asuras* and *nāgas*. It is neither a stable lower level within cosmology nor a purely psychological symbol, but a transitional space situated among empirical geography, mythic space, and ritual accomplishment.

What this article reveals, therefore, is not a process in which an external concept was either wholly accepted or completely rejected, but a process in which a transreligious concept was disassembled, reorganized, and functionally reconfigured within Buddhism. Prior to late esoteric Buddhism, *pātāla* did not enter Buddhist cosmology in the form of a seven-layered underworld. Yet elements associated with subterranean space, non-human abodes, cave entrances, wealth, and the imagination of accomplishment were combined with Buddhism's own narrative traditions concerning *nāgaloka* and *asura* spaces, and were eventually transformed in esoteric Buddhism into a liminal field of practice that could be opened through ritual. This process shows that the relationship between Buddhism and Indian religious traditions cannot be reduced to influence and acceptance. It should instead be understood as an ongoing selective restructuring among existing narrative resources, cosmological frameworks, and goals of practice.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable. This study is based exclusively on textual and historical analysis and does not involve human or animal subjects requiring ethical review or approval.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable. This study involves no human subjects or identifiable patient data requiring informed consent.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created in this study. The textual sources analyzed are cited in the notes and references. Data sharing is not applicable, as this research relies solely on textual analysis of existing scriptures, cited in the references.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

A	Zhaocheng Jinzang 趙城金藏/Jin Edition of the Canon
AKBh	Abhidharmakośabhāṣya
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
AP	Agni Purāṇa
BhP	Bhāgavata Purāṇa
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association
D	Derge Kangyur/Degé Kangyur catalogue number
HV	Harivaṃśa
MBh	Mahābhārata
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
T	Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經/Taishō Tripiṭaka
VāP	Vāyu Purāṇa
VP	Viṣṇu Purāṇa
VR	Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa/Rāmāyaṇa

Notes

- ¹ tāubhau prītamanaśau kāryavattāṃ nivedya ha | varuṇenānujñātau nāgalokaṃ vicaretaḥ ||
- ² etattu nāgalokasya nābhisthāne sthitaṃ puram | pātālamiti vikhyātaṃ daityadānavasevitam ||
- ³ Sāvatti || Tatravoca || Himavantam bhikkhave pabbatarājānaṃ nissāya nāgā kāyaṃ vaḍḍhenti balam gāhenti || te tattha kāyaṃ vaḍḍhetvā balam gāhetvā kussubbhe otaranti || kusubbhe otarivā mahāsobbhe otaranti || mahāsobbhe otarivā kunnadiyo otaranti || kunnadiyo otarivā mahānadiyo otaranti || mahānadiyo otarivā mahāsamuddasāgaram otaranti || Te tattha mahantatam vepullatam āpajjantikāyena |
- ⁴ Aṅga-Magadha-ratthānaṃ antare Campā nāma nadī, tattha nāgabhavanaṃ ahosi
- ⁵ 下方者，法性之淵底，玄宗之極地，故言下方。在下不屬此，空中不屬彼，非此非彼即中道也。出此不在上不在此下，不上不下住在空中，亦是中道也。
- ⁶ 并過地輪復入水際。爾時龍王即拔其箭。
- ⁷ 三藏沙門法天譯，法賢證梵義，施護證梵文
- ⁸ śrāvakayāne hy ātmapariniṣvāṇāy evāśayas tat artham evopadeśas tat artham eva prayogaḥ parittaś ca puṇyajñānaśaṃbhārasaṃgrhīta upastambhaḥ, kālena cālpena tat artham prāpyati vipatṭir api janmabhiḥ | mahāyāne tu sarvaṃ viparyayeṇa |

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